Minutes of the Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting Held on December 12, 2019

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, December 12, 2019 at Litchfield Town Hall, 2 Liberty Way, Litchfield, NH 03052.

PRESENT: K Douglas (Chair), A Cutter (Vice Chair), J Martin, N Fordey, B Hodgkins, W Hayes, R Leary (Selectmen's Representative), C Harrison (School Board Representative)

Absent: J Bourque; R Meyers arrived late

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Douglas called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. She announced there are technical difficulties with the broadcast.

• PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. PUBLIC INPUT

Rich Lascelles, 236 Charles Bancroft Highway, commented that he has lived in Litchfield for many years and through the years has seen many changes in the town. He came to the meeting tonight to answer the question concerning what was to become of the money that was left over from the bond payment for CHS.

Mr. Lascelles commented that he has also been looking at the budgets and taxes and has sat on the Budget Committee in the past as well held as other positions in town. He told the Budget Committee they have an awesome responsibility and the past teachers' contract emphasizes that. He mentioned that he represents Litchfield in the Legislature and are always discussing priorities regarding spending. Mr. Lascelles commented that for many people in Litchfield they spend more money in taxes to the town than to Washington DC and for many that are not in their prime earning years, their town tax bill is significant. He acknowledged the impact on the tax increases on a struggling young couple or older person becomes more and more burdensome.

Mr. Lascelles commented through the years, the emphasis in town has been if we felt we couldn't afford something we would get volunteers and if we couldn't get volunteers we would do without. The town has become more affluent and people want things, but do not have the time to volunteer and don't mind paying for it, but they want it now. For others in town it becomes more of a burden. With respect to the bond, many people thought when the bond was paid off repairs would be done to GMS; however, the answer is that there was no thought about what would happen when the bond was paid. Just because the bond is paid does not mean there is extra money. Once the final payment is made, it goes away.

Mr. Lascelles commented former President Jimmy Carter was a great proponent of zero based budgeting. He indicated in many cases it is not practical, but the idea of justifying expenditures is what is important. Many times the budget keeps ratcheting up and you fall into that and it is difficult for members of the Budget Committee to sit across the table from their friends or neighbors and say no. It emphasizes the pressure you are under.

Mr. Lascelles noted in NH we have the lowest state and local tax burden of any state in the country and many states look at NH and wonder how we do it. We do a lot of things right in NH and one of those things is that we keep a lot of taxes local, which puts more pressure on the Budget Committee. He indicated that he came here specifically to answer the question about the bond and repeated that we really didn't think about what would happen when it was paid off. He noted whenever it was over it was over. He expressed appreciation to the Budget Committee for the job they do and the pressure they are under.

3. MEMBER INPUT

Mr. Cutter indicated that he asked that Member Input be added earlier in the meeting. He commented that he will provide a summary of the FY21 Proposed District budget and prior year comparisons to the Committee to discuss. He thanked Committee members for affording him the opportunity to meet with Dr. Jette and Mr. Izbicki last week, during which he reviewed his analysis with them. He noted that he shared with them that a \$1M increase in the budget is unsustainable. Mr. Cutter indicated that he understands costs across district have increased and many items are contractual, but there are many that are not contractual. He does not believe the Committee should go through the budget page by page, but that they should look at the budget as a whole and discuss if costs are justified. Mr. Cutter commented he is not here to cripple the district or impact the district's goals and priorities. He indicated the goal is to present a budget that is fair and equitable to the district and fiscally responsible to the taxpayers.

Mr. Cutter indicated that his recommendations are based on factual data, looking at data primarily from 2017 forward and in some cases 2014 forward. He noted the primary reduction will be attrition to be applied across all salary/benefit lines and includes the new position in kindergarten and if the Committee recommends a warrant article for the additional position,he will back that out of the total reductions. He commented that he realizes the budget is prepared 12-18 months out, but we never spend all the money.

Mrs. Douglas read an email from Jen Bourque, Budget Committee member. In the letter, Mrs. Bouruqe explained her absences from the meetings due to the passing of her mother and the business of the estate.

4. REVIEW / ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

• November 14, 2019

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to approve the minutes of November 14, 2019 as amended

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

VOTE: 7-0-1, with Mrs. Harrison abstaining

The motion carried.

• November 21, 2019

The November 21, 2019 minutes were tabled until the next meeting.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. Douglas announced that she received an email from Mrs. Bourque, who requested the email be read aloud. Mrs. Bourque provided an explanation of her absence from the Committee meetings.

6. OLD BUSINESS

• Review of School Building Tours

Mrs. Fordey thanked the facilities staff, Mr. Izbicki and Dr. Jette for the opportunity to tour the schools. She indicated it was a thorough tour that answered a lot of questions. She noted that LCTV recorded the tour, which will air soon.

• School Budget Deliberations

Mrs. Douglas commented the Budget Committee would go over the budget by object account.

Mr. Izbicki thanked Matt Lepore for filming the tour of the schools. He provided information and updates to the Committee regarding inquiries made by Committee members. He indicated that inquiries included:

- the Special Education Board Certified Behavior Analyst: serves students by providing support in 3 areas, with roles provided by different individuals depending on student needs; the roles are billed by the vendor at different rates. The increase in the cost budgeted is due to the increase in the number of students requiring these services.
- Special Education Transportation: increase due to the use of an alternate vendor, which requires two routes due to the increase in the number of students. Billed on a per student rate.
- CHS Challenge Day: the intent is to make the program available every other school year beginning in 2021. The FY20 program will run three days (in FY19 there was an opportunity to run the program for one day).
- Budget Analysis with Mr. Cutter: specific concerns in the areas of Workshops/Conferences and Travel (Professional Development) and Salaries and Benefits (Attrition). For the review, the following were provided:
 - Three year actual attrition numbers
 - Review of workshops and travel
 - o Reconciliation of budgeted amounts for salaries and benefits
 - Reconciliation of general fund budget with health insurance reduction
 - Reconciliation of change in payroll per approved CBA.

Mr. Izbicki explained that the information provided for workshops and conferences shows an increase that reflects a change in how professional development is provided. He noted accounts were consolidated from school level to district level for greater control. He indicated the travel line total increase was approximately \$1,500 over five years and there is actually a reduction from FY20 to FY21. With reference to the 2900 account, he noted that there was a reduction in that function account last year that was applied in that account and was eventually applied to the separate lines in the budget, which is time consuming.

Mr. Cutter pointed out that the FY20 budget is the approved budget and his analysis was based on actual expenditures.

Mr. Cutter indicated that the numbers in his analysis and recommendations for reductions are not representative of the benefits reduction.

Dr. Jette commented that Account 100 and 110 are salaries and the attrition reduction is applied here. He indicated that the School Board discussed what to do with the additional kindergarten

teacher and this budget number includes that position. He added if the Budget Committee agrees we can pull that budgeted amount out of the budget and place an article for a reserve fund on the warrant, and if approved those funds will be deposited in the fund. He indicated that will leave us with \$312,000, which is close to the attrition information supplied by Mr. Izbicki.

Mrs. Douglas commented that she is always supportive of placing a position on the warrant.

Mrs. Fordey clarified that the creation of the reserve fund was proposed.

Mr. Cutter commented due to the policy change by the School Board, the student ratio has changed and with that a need for the additional kindergarten position. He feels the position can be put on the warrant.

Dr. Jette commented the School Board is proposing a warrant article to take those funds out of the fund balance and put them in a reserve fund for that purpose. He indicated we can take it out of the budget for next year with a positive recommendation from the Budget Committee.

Mr. Meyers commented the School Board was concerned that if we pull that money out of the budget and the warrant article fails and the Budget Committee applies a large reduction to salaries, we will have to find that money somewhere.

Mrs. Douglas asked if the voters support the policy change.

Mr. Meyers pointed out if the enrollment number requires a fifth teacher we have to add that teacher. He noted this is about placing those funds into a fund for that purpose.

Mrs. Douglas asked why would we create a fund just for an unexpected kindergarten teacher. She commented that she would be reluctant to focus it on just one grade. She indicated that the class size policy was changed and asked what will happen if the voters do not support the policy.

Several Committee members and members of the district indicated that policy is not under the purview of the voters.

Mr. Cutter commented the question is will the Committee support an article for the district to place the money in a fund to do what they need to do for staffing.

Dr. Jette clarified that the amount they are referring to is \$102,000, which is the salary/benefits for the teacher and salary for the paraprofessional. He indicated that the fund can be a staffing reserve fund. He commented kindergarten is a very unpredictable number and it is easier to respond to staffing needs for grades 1-3 because the students are already in the system. He noted we are in an unfortunate position now because we have this money in our budget and we are only asking to put it into a fund to use for additional staff. He added if the public is upset about the policy, he encourages them to approach the School Board.

Mrs. Douglas commented she would support a more broad capital reserve fund.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 110-260, Salaries and Benefits, by \$103,000, which is representative of the additional kindergarten teacher and paraprofessional and to place the funding on the warrant.

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

VOTE: 8-0-0

The motion carried.

Mr. Hodgkins commented it does not matter what we say since it is a bottom line reduction and they will apply the reduction where they want.

Mr. Cutter indicated that we want to be transparent about where we want it applied, but it is up to the School Board to decide where they want to apply the reduction.

Dr. Jette indicated that we need a strong recommendation by the Budget Committee to move forward with the warrant article. He commented it is more an understanding of how we will make this occur. He noted we will write a general staffing reserve fund article.

Mr. Cutter commented that it defaults back to the School Board and whatever is in the best interest of the district. He indicated he would support it either way.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 110-260, Salaries and Benefits, by \$297,000, which aligns with the district attrition numbers **SECOND:** by Mr. Hayes

Mr. Meyers was concerned that the reduction is too deep and if the staffing reserve fund article fails and a fifth kindergarten teacher is needed, the district will have to fund that position.

Mr. Izbicki commented that there is a low expectation of teachers who may give their intent to retire next year.

Dr. Jette commented over the summer there were people that retired. He indicated the number proposed is the number from last year and the highest of the years.

Mr. Cutter commented that the FY21 budget is \$1M higher than FY20.

Dr. Jette suggested that a reduction of \$260,000 is more palatable and provides more flexibility for the district.

Mr. Cutter polled Budget Committee members to determine which amount they would support for a reduction.

Mrs. Fordey, Mr. Leary and Mr. Meyers felt more comfortable with a reduction of \$260,000 as there are too many unknowns.

Mrs. Douglas, Mr. Hayes, Mrs. Martin, Mr. Hodgkins felt comfortable with a reduction of \$297,000

VOTE: 5-3-0, with Mrs. Fordey, Mr. Meyers and Mr. Leary opposing The motion carried.

Mr. Leary felt that the additional 3rd grade teacher and the additional custodian for CHS should be on warrant articles based on the 2003 article.

Mr. Meyers indicated that there was an article approved in 2004 that contradicts that article.

Mrs. Douglas explained there are five second grade classes that will move forward and a fifth grade 3 teacher is warranted.

Mr. Leary commented that he has to stand by his convictions.

MOTION: by Mr. Leary

Move to reduce the additional custodian for CHS from the FY21 budget for a total reduction

of \$53,051.57

SECOND: by Mr. Cutter

Mr. Cutter asked if this is a new position.

Dr. Jette clarified it is not a new position. He explained this position was reduced and the building condition suffered because of it. He indicated there is too much square footage and we are under staffed. He commented we are going back to the level of coverage that we had.

Mrs. Douglas commented this is a good discussion for putting the position on the warrant. She indicated it is a new position because we do not have a second position.

Mr. Cutter disagreed because there was an existing position that has not been filled.

Dr. Jette indicated the position was reduced because the economy was not good at that time and now the crew is shorthanded and in need of that position again.

Mr. Meyers commented during the NEASC visit the Visiting Team was shocked at the condition of the high school. He indicated the building is heavily used. He added we have let ourselves down as a town because we did not keep up with the building.

Mrs. Fordey commented the level of service has suffered at CHS.

VOTE: 4-4-0, with Mr. Cutter, Mrs. Fordey, Mrs. Martin and Mr. Meyers opposing The motion failed.

Account 270 - Course Reimbursement Non-Union

MOTION: by Mr. Hodgkins

Move to reduce Account 270 by \$176

SECOND: by Mr. Cutter

Mr. Hodgkins commented that the total in that account has increased 4.95% and he is reducing it by 2.2%.

Mr. Hayes commented there seems to be no rationale for reducing the account. He suggested applying it to the bottom line.

Mrs. Douglas suggested to continue on to see how close the Committee can come to Mr. Cutter's total recommendation and if we are not close enough we can revisit this account.

Mr. Hodgkins commented he does not care how we get there as long as we get there.

MOTION: by Mr. Leary

Amended the motion to reduce Account 270 by \$4,000

SECOND: by Mr. Cutter

Mr. Leary commented he has reduced the account based on 2019 and prior actual expenditures.

Mrs. Fordey commented they are requesting \$8,000 and you are reducing \$4,000, but in the past two years they have used more than \$8,000.

Mr. Izbicki indicated the account has already been reduced \$4,000.

VOTE ON AMENDED MOTION: 2-6-0, with Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Leary in support The amended motion failed.

MOTION: by Mr. Hayes

Amended the motion to reduce Account 270 by \$2,000

SECOND: by Mr. Hodgkins

Mr. Hayes commented the reduction is more in line with the historical average of \$6,200.

Mr. Cutter believes the account is properly budgeted as requested. He indicated he is not looking to eliminate needed programs.

Mrs. Douglas commented that she supports the number as budgeted as she encourages the training.

VOTE ON AMENDED MOTION: 3-5-0, with Mr. Hayes, Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Leary in support

The amended motion failed.

VOTE ON THE ORIGINAL MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 270 BY \$176: 2-6-0, with Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Leary in support The original motion failed.

Account 271 - Course Reimbursement Union

MOTION: by Mr. Hodgkins

Move to reduce Account 271 by \$7,500

SECOND: by Mr. Cutter

Ms. Widman reminded the Committee members that what was budgeted in Account 320 has been combined in the district-wide 271 Account, which is why it reflects an increase. She noted that Account 320 has been reduced to \$0.

Mrs. Douglas commented realistically it represents an overall reduction of \$7,000.

Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Cutter withdrew the motion and the second.

Account 272 - Copnference/Workshop Reimbursement

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 272 by \$22,647.50

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

Mr. Cutter indicated he based the reduction upon past history and information provided by Mr. Izbicki. He commented although it is less budgeted than FY20, it is more of a strategic process.

Ms. Widman offered to explain the increase in FY20 as well as in FY21. When she was hired in the district, many specific trainings that were budgeted in each school budget was transferred to a district professional development fund. All monies were removed from Account 320 and placed into one fund. The goal is vertical alignment across the district, which will provide more oversight and control. This is an example of being more strategic as a district.

Mr. Cutter indicated he is concerned about the conferences and workshops budget.

Ms. Widman indicated that she is specifically speaking about training for PLTW (Project Lead the Way) and AP certification. She explained new teachers need to be trained for PLTW or we cannot offer those courses; and, AP recertification is a requirement when we add new teachers and new courses. She noted that all lines for Account 320 are zeroed out.

Mr. Hayes commented that shows a significant reduction already.

Mr. Cutter commented with travel (Account 580) and Account 272 totals combined the budget is at \$89,000.

Mr. Izbicki commented we are now at a significant decrease in the budget from FY20. He indicated that the district has already reduced the budget by \$250,000 in health insurance.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to amend the motion to reduce Accounts 272 and 580 by \$20,000 (\$10,000 reduction to

Account 272 and \$10,000 reduction to Account 580)

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

VOTE ON THE AMENDED MOTION: 7-1-0, with Mr. Meyers opposing

The amended motion carried.

VOTE ON THE MAIN MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNTS 272 AND 580 BY \$20,000:

7-1-0, with Mr. Meyers opposing

The main motion carried.

Account 325 Testing Protocols **MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 325, Testing Protocols, by \$4,000

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Mr. Cutter indicated that he based his reduction on an average of actual expenditures.

Dr. Jette commented that the Special Services budget has already been over expended this year. He indicated that this account is budgeted for required testing for those students and we are legally mandated to supply the testing protocols. He explained there is an increased need of services in special education.

Mrs. Bandurski noted that the district is required to supply the protocols for cognitive testing. She indicated that we look at on average how many protocols are renewed and it does vary. She explained when we have new evaluations, we only have one year to purchase the assessments and we do not always know when a new assessment is coming out.

Mrs. Douglas commented that she is struggling on this. She indicated that based on what your end of year fund balances look like, we are only reducing what is returned.

Mrs. Bandurski indicated the testing will be done, but the money will come from somewhere else in the budget.

Mr. Cutter commented we will not make any motions on the tuition line, which is always over budgeted. He indicated there are always lines in the Special Services budget that are over budgeted.

Dr. Jette reminded the Committee that the district has pulled from the Special Services Capital Reserve Fund, which will have to be replenished from year end funds. He commented there is not a district that functions on a zero fund balance, and a healthy fund balance that is reasonable is recommended by the auditors. He indicated we cannot risk going into deficit spending.

Mrs. Douglas does not believe \$4,000 will impact the fund balance. She believes there is money in the budget that does not need to be in there.

Mr. Cutter commented that his goal is not to cripple the district. He believes a healthy fund balance is in the range of \$500,000 at the end of the year. He indicated even with the recommendations there will be plenty at the end of the year.

VOTE: 4-4-0
The motion failed.

Account 330 Professional Services

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 330 by \$50,000

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

Mr. Cutter indicated that will still leave an increase of \$20,000.

Mr. Izbicki indicated the School Psychologist and BCBA (Behavioral Analyst) is in this line.

Mr. Cutter indicated there are two specific lines in this motion, legal services and professional services

Mr. Izbicki noted that legal services has increased due to negotiations and grievances.

Dr. Jette explained one personnel grievance cost the district \$15,000 in legal services.

Mrs. Bandurski indicated that we have not been able to fill the Psychologist position so we are currently contracting services at the same level for the needs we currently have. She noted all funds this year are allocated.

Mrs. Fordey commented there is a critical shortage of school psychologists.

MOTION: by Mrs. Fordey

Move to amend the motion to reduce Account 330 by \$10,000

SECOND: by Mr. Hodgkins

Mrs. Fordey commented it is challenging when looking at the budget by account because the accounts encompass many things. She indicated that some of these are professional services for special education and some are for other functions. She noted she does not want to impact student needs.

VOTE ON AMENDED MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 330 BY \$10,000: 4-4-0 The motion failed.

VOTE ON ORIGINAL MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 330 BY \$50,000: 4-4-0 The motion failed.

Account 335 Legal Services **MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 335 by \$3,000

SECOND: by Mrs. Douglas

Mr. Cutter indicated this is a reduction in legal services for special education. He noted if the Committee can see more up to date data he would be willing to add it back.

Mrs. Douglas commented whatever is being used by this attorney is already being captured by district legal services.

Mrs. Bandurski explained that any legal bills for special education are what is reflected in Account 335. She noted that there is a different legal firm used for special education than for the district

VOTE: 6-2-0, with Mr. Meyers and Mrs. Martin opposing The motion carried.

Account 339 Athletic Trainer Services

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 339 by \$2,000

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Principal Lonergan indicated that is a contracted service for the athletic trainer and is paid to him in a lump sum contract.

Mr. Cutter and Mr. Leary withdrew the motion and second.

Account 391 Game Official **MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 391 by \$6,663

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Principal Lonergan indicated this account can be variable as part of the challenge is predicting when the teams will be in the playoffs and championship. He noted when our teams are not in the playoffs the line is not all spent; however, the State increased the fees over the last year and there may be an increase next year.

Mr. Cutter commented the average budgeted is \$35,000. Dr. Jette indicated that the smaller number budgeted in that account is for LMS and is very tight.

Mr. Meyers clarified that Lacrosse has been added as a sport, which was previously self-funded.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Amended the motion to reduce Account 391 by \$5,000

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

VOTE ON THE AMENDED MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 391 BY \$5,000: 7-1-0, with Mr. Meyers opposing The motion carried.

VOTE ON THE MAIN MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 391 BY \$5,000: 7-1-0, with

Mr. Meyers opposing The motion carried.

Account 422 Snow Plowing **MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 422 by \$2,002

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Mr. Cutter commented that he understands it is difficult to predict snow plowing for the winter.

Mr. Izbicki indicated that the snow plowing contract is a fixed rate contract.

VOTE: 5-3-0, with Mr. Meyers, Mr. Leary and Mr. Hayes opposing The motion carried.

Account 446 Software Lease

Mr. Cutter indicated this account is all contractual.

Mrs. Fordey mentioned there was a software lease for an unfunded security mandate.

Mr. Pelletier explained part of that line is for Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Cloud, which is built into the curriculum. He noted that \$17,000 has been budgeted for the software tool the State has given us to be compliant with HB 1612.

Mr. Izbicki added that Line 446 in the SAU budget is for eFinance software, which is contractual.

Account 519 Transportation **MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

Move to reduce Account 519 by \$49,443

SECOND: by Mr. Hodgkins

Mr. Izbicki reminded the Committee that student transportation and the cost is contractual.

Mr. Cutter indicated this includes all transportation and the reduction brings the total to \$1,120,000.

Mr. Meyers indicated there was an increase in out of district transportation. Mrs. Bandurski noted the increase was \$25,000 over FY20.

Mr. Meyers indicated the School Board previously adjusted this number twice.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Amend the motion to reduce Account 519 by \$30,000

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Dr. Jette commented that the new Athletic Director has inherited the problems left from the former Athletic Director at CHS. He indicated that the new bus contract has changed the rates and the bottom line is that we have to send the student athletes to the games they are playing. He noted there are additional sports teams as well.

Mr. Meyers commented we are in the worst position to be a Division III school because we are surrounded by larger schools and our trips are a further distance.

Principal Lonergan indicated that we budgeted for \$25,000 this year and are to date at \$33,000. He estimated next season may be approximately \$24,000.

VOTE ON AMENDED MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 519 BY \$30,000: 6-2-0, with Mrs. Fordey and Mr. Hayes opposing The motion carried.

VOTE ON MAIN MOTION TO REDUCE ACCOUNT 519 BY \$30,000: 6-2-0, with Mrs. Fordey and Mr. Meyers opposing The motion carried.

Mrs. Douglas indicated that the Committee will continue deliberations at the next meeting.

7. REPORTS

• Town Business

o General Update

Mr. Leary reported the Select Board will be presenting warrant articles next week and is working on the default budget. He mentioned the police chief is retiring and a new chief will be starting soon.

8. MEMBER INPUT/ NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Fordey commented that it may help the public understand if they watch the Select Board meetings when they discuss the budget and warrant articles.

9. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

10. ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to adjourn the meeting at 9:28 p.m.

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

VOTE: 8-0-0

The motion carried.

Next meeting: December 19, 2019

Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: